

**SURVIVAL FACTORS GROUP
INTERVIEWS
ATTACHMENT #2
(15 Pages)**

Motorcoach Driver

Using an interpreter with the Dallas County Sheriff's Department, the NTSB requested the Motorcoach Driver to provide a 72-hour history of his activities. The following is summary of what he said:

He lives in a trailer with his wife and family on the same premises as the bus company for which he works. He said that he takes 1 dose of Buterol 500 mg a day after eating dinner.

- Monday night 9/19/05 attended the Dallas Cowboys football game with a group he drove up from Houston. Went to bed at 1:00 a.m. Tuesday morning
- Spent the night at the American Inn on Route 114 in Irving, Texas
- Left the hotel at 9:00 a.m. and returned the group to Houston.
- Arrived home in Pharr, Texas at 6:30 p.m.
- Went to bed at 9:00 p.m. Tuesday night 9/20/05
- Woke up at 8:00 a.m. on Wednesday 9/20/05
- Went to work at 9:30 a.m. Changed air conditioning filters on the motorcoach.
- He was told by his employer that he was on stand-by for FEMA for a possible transportation.
- After completing the filter change at 10:30 a.m. he went shopping with his wife until 2:00 p.m. Wednesday.
- He returned home and ate an MRE (Meal-Ready-to-Eat) that he received while in New Orleans.
- He said that he called his employer at 5:00 p.m. and was told to go to work at 5:30 p.m. and "gas up" the motorcoach. His boss told him he had to be in Houston by 12:00 noon Thursday 9/21/05 in order to transport group of elderly persons from a nursing home in Bellaire, Texas to Dallas.
- After fueling the motorcoach he went to Wal-Mart to buy a plastic tub for his belongings.
- He returned to his trailer at 7:30 p.m. and packed up his belongings.
- At 9:00 he ate dinner and went to bed between 9:30 – 10:00 p.m.
- On Thursday morning he woke up at 4:30 a.m. and showered.
- He left for Houston at 5:30 a.m.
- He said that he arrived at the nursing home outside Houston at 11:00 a.m.
- He checked-in with the nursing home staff and afterwards sat and watched TV while eating an apple and a coke. He noted there was a lot of traffic heading north on I-45.
- He went back to the motorcoach and took a 2-hour nap, lying across a seat.
- He started loading the motorcoach with patients, wheelchairs, and the patient's belongings between 1:00 -1:30 p.m.
- While loading motorcoach he noticed Oxygen canisters being loaded in storage under the motorcoach. He said that they loaded a cart of approximately 12 cylinders and brought another 6 on-board.

- Prior to departing, a woman who spoke some Spanish, and who worked at the nursing home was going on the trip, offered him some lunch in the cafeteria. He ate fish and asparagus.
- The motorcoach departed the nursing home at between 3:00 - 3:30 p.m.
- Around 4:00 p.m. he was instructed to pull over in order that the nursing staff could retrieve 2 Oxygen cylinders from storage area. The Oxygen users were seated towards back of the motorcoach.
- He took a 'round-about way' to I-45 due to heavy traffic. He got on I-45 around 7:00 p.m.
- The motorcoach stopped outside of Huntsville, Texas at a Pilot gas station at exit #118 in order to refuel.
- He said that approximately 10 minutes after refueling he had to pull over in order to retrieve another 4 cylinders of Oxygen.
- About 4:00 a.m. the right rear tire went flat.
- He pulled off onto the shoulder to check the tire and saw that it was deflated and twisted on rim.
- He put on his four-way warning flashers and tried to continue slowly driving for another ¼ mile prior to pulling partially to the right shoulder but was still blocking part of the left lane of traffic.
- A Texas Department of Transportation truck and a Rice Police Officer arrived shortly thereafter. A wrecker (tow truck) was (he did not know who) called to fix tire.
- The Rice Police Officer used his head lights to help illuminate the right rear wheel well while the wrecker driver was fixing the flat tire.
- The wrecker driver used 2 jacks in order to lift the motorcoach and to repair the tire because the tire was twisted on rim.
- When he returned the flat tire to storage bin he noticed that steel belts were sticking out from tire.
- He said that no one mentioned that anything was wrong with tire or axle.
- He said that he pulled up to Exit #242 in order for the healthcare supervisor on bus, to pay the wrecker driver for the flat tire repair.
- He said that they began driving again around 5:00 a.m.
- A healthcare supervisor told him to get off at Exit #284.
- He said that he resumed driving northbound when a white vehicle pulled up beside him and then pulled in front of him slowing to a stop.
- When he applied his brakes the bus started to shutter and shake.
- He pulled over to right shoulder and got out. After seeing fire in the right rear wheel well, he went back into bus and attempted to retrieve the fire extinguisher under the seat in the second row passenger side. He said he was unable to unlatch it.
- He said that he immediately started trying to pull people off the motorcoach.
- He said he pulled a couple people off then tried opening a couple of windows on the driver's side to vent smoke in the cabin.
- About this time other people and police officers entered the motorcoach trying to take people off the motorcoach.

Additional Statements Made By Motorcoach Driver

- He said that he only has a Mexican driver's license, Conductor Class.
- He said that he received his driver's license in 1988 and it expires in 2006
- He has been in the United States since January of this year (2005).
- He has worked for this same employer in the past (from 2002 until August 2003) but they had a disagreement and went back to Mexico.
- He said that he normally drives on the weekends to casinos in Lake Charles, LA. and transports schools to local high school football games.
- He said that he had driven to New Orleans to help transport people away from hurricane under another FEMA agreement with his employer.
- The company has a total of four buses and four drivers. He is the only one with a Mexican driver's license.
- His employer has him take a physical every year.
- He said that he can not read or speak the English Language

Interview with Supervising Nurse

Senior Area Director of Residential Care, Sunrise Senior Living Centers

The following information was taken from an interview with the Supervisor :

- According to the Supervisor, she volunteered to be on the bus to supervise the evacuation.
- She said that although she does speak Spanish she is not to be considered a fluent Spanish speaker.
- The Supervisor said that Sunrise Area Manager, was the one that hired the busing company.
- The day started at 8:00 a.m. reviewing a list of nursing home evacuees, some with family members, deciding which ones would go where and with whom. Also there were discussions on the conditions (health) and stability of the patients being transported.
- They have no policies on what to do on outings they take other than to call 911 if someone has a medical emergency.
- They usually take a large van and if more than 8 residents are going they take a 15-passenger van
- She left the facility around 11:00 a.m. to return her rental car. As they exited the community parking lot, she saw the bus pulling into the lot.
- When she returned around 12:15 p.m., she could see residents already lining up and 4-5 firemen present to help carry them onto bus.
- The firemen volunteered to help load the residents
- She talked to the bus driver, who said he was hungry; so she took him to the cafeteria.
- The bus was fully loaded at around 2:30 p.m.
- The Supervisor didn't know who loaded the oxygen cylinders and clothing onto the bus.

- The Supervisor wasn't sure if the bus driver knew that the Oxygen bottles were on-board.
- They started driving by taking Highway 610 east to Highway 59 north. Initially there was little traffic on Highway 59. As they drove north on Highway 59, traffic became gridlocked.
- She spoke with the bus driver while on Highway 59 telling him they needed to get onto I-45 northbound.
- Prior to getting onto I-45 the motorcoach pulled to a gore area to trade Oxygen cylinders. She thought they got another 3 or 4 cylinders.
- While driving north on I-45 she noticed that the fuel gauge was under half so she told the driver they should stop and refuel since the trip was taking extraordinarily longer than anticipated. They stopped at a Pilot Gas station.
- She said that it wasn't set up for her to pay but she paid anyway for the refueling and tire repair because the driver wasn't prepared to pay for anything.
- After refueling they exchanged more Oxygen cylinders and did it once more prior to getting first flat tire. It was at this time she e-mailed Sunrise Area Manager on her Blackberry, inquiring about where they would need to go in order to get more Oxygen if needed. She later realized after talking with other team members on the bus that they had a sufficient supply.
- While on I-45 the bus experienced a flat tire. She could hear a, "thud, bang".
- She said the bus "limped" along on I-45 while she called 911. She initially didn't know what mile marker (MM) until they came to MM 241.
- The dispatcher told her they would call the Sheriff's Department to assist them
- The 911 dispatcher instructed them to continue to the next exit but the motorcoach couldn't move anymore so they stopped in the right lane.
- The Supervisor said "some department" pulled up along with a couple of pick-up trucks and they lifted the bus with hydraulic lifts and repaired the tire.
- She said she initially exited the motorcoach to see the flattened tire but went back on the bus for the entire repair process.
- She said after the tire was repaired they drove to the next exit where she paid for the repair job.
- The next time she knew of impending trouble was when a pick-up truck pulled in front of the bus and abruptly stopped while they were in the left lane.
- The pick-up truck driver walked back to the bus driver's window and said there were flames from the right rear wheel and it must be the brake pads.
- She said that the driver seemed to understand because he then pulled the bus over to the right side.
- She said that she, the bus driver, and two other nurses got off to see what was wrong. She said the bus driver immediately tried putting out the fire by taking his shirt off waving it at the fire then by throwing grass and dirt onto it.
- She said she got back on the bus and said, "Oh God we need to get the residents off".
- She said they rolled one guy to the floor and started pulling him off.
- Other team members and bystanders came to help get residents off the bus.
- She recalled helping one resident, with tan tie-up shoes, to the door.

- She went back in and heard team member Sheila saying she couldn't breath.
- The supervisor didn't recall anyone opening windows during the evacuation.
- She didn't recall seeing any warning lights on the dash from her seat position in the front row right side.
- The supervisor recalled seeing some type of unknown canister near the bus driver.

She also related two additional thoughts on the trip:

- If there was another exit on the bus, it would have helped to get more residents off.
- The duration of the trip was "longer than anyone could have imagined".

Group Statements from Healthcare Workers on Motorcoach¹

The following is a compendium of observations made by the nursing home employees on the motorcoach that were taken during the group portion of the NTSB interview on Monday September 26, 2005 at the Forum Nursing Home in Dallas, Texas:

- I tried to open the side windows but didn't see the latches.
- The driver should have done a pre-trip briefing on how to open the windows prior to departing Houston.
- An emergency exit door on the bus, like they have on school buses, would have been helpful.
- I immediately smelled something burning after second tire popped.
- I heard Bonnie say "Oh my God". She said it 2 times. I said "What? Bonnie said, "The bus is on fire".
- When we stopped the bus driver got off first then Bonnie, then me, and then Sheila followed. We saw the fire toward the back of the vehicle and I ran back in and yelled, "Get out!" The bus driver then tried to get something from under the second seat on passenger's side.
- Flames started coming in the last window on the right side and caught the newspapers on fire. The windows were covered in newspaper the previous day to keep the sun out.
- Some of the elderly patients were being stubborn and refusing to move.
- I tried to get two residents off who were seated toward the back, where I was seated, but they resisted and pushed me away.
- Because some people wouldn't move we had to get the other ones off toward the front.
- Only 2 people on the bus were using Oxygen cylinders.
- I went back on the bus to try and get more people off but the smoke was thick and I stepped on someone in the aisle as I tried to get in and out.
- Some of the patients stood at the door waiting for us to help them out.

¹ For detailed interviews with five of the six healthcare workers aboard the motorcoach, refer to the Human Performance Group Chairman's report.

- We stopped prior to route 59 in order to get more Oxygen bottles on the bus. We brought 4 on and put the two empties underneath the bus. As those emptied out we put them under the back seat on the driver's side.
- Bonnie was e-mailing a team member on her Blackberry asking for them to contact FEMA in order to get more Oxygen bottles. We were afraid that we wouldn't have enough.

Witness Interview 1

Truck driver from Corsicana

I was driving northbound on I-45. Traffic was heavy due to evacuation. While driving through Ferris, I happened to get behind the bus and saw sparks from the right rear dual tire. As I got up closer I saw more sparks. As traffic opened up I thought I'd be able to catch up along side and signal him about the fire, but couldn't catch up. The bus was in the far left lane and I was in the far right lane. As I changed into the center lane I could see a bright red circle around the rear wheel drum. It was glowing red hot. I pulled in behind the bus and started flashing my lights on and off trying to get his attention. Then a guy in a white truck pulled to the far right lane and sped up pulling in front of the bus and stopped it in the far left lane. As we were stopped I could smell the brakes burning. I then started to pull along side in the median shoulder to say something but about 5 or 6 other vehicles followed me. Then I saw the guy in the white truck talking to the bus driver through the side window. I decided to just drive by and a few miles up I heard a guy on the CB mention a bus was on fire with explosions.

Witness Interviews 2 & 3

Husband and wife, witnesses

They said they were driving northbound on I-45 on their way to breakfast when they decided to exit at Mars Road due to the heavy traffic. As they exited they saw the bus on the shoulder with the right rear tire on fire. The fire wasn't very bad when they first saw it. They had a fire extinguisher and thought they might be able to extinguish the fire. The wife said she first called 911. They then stopped their car and yelled out but didn't think anyone heard them so they got out and briskly walked over to the bus. They said they didn't think anyone heard them because nobody was moving from what they could see. They said when they initially went on the bus there was no fire or smoke. They said they got on the bus and saw all the elderly people just looking shocked and a man on the floor in the aisle. They said they told the passengers that the bus was on fire and they started removing people from the bus. It seemed like the people on the bus didn't know what was happening. They said as they were taking people off a policeman came up and also started helping remove people. They couldn't recall how many trips they made on and off the bus. The wife remembered a nurse yelling hysterically, "Oh my God, Oh my God". When more people started coming, the wife started moving people away from the bus towards the frontage road. The wife recalled hearing 3 explosions. The husband said that he was on the bus during the second explosion trying to get a person off. After getting off they backed away because it was too late to help anyone else. The husband remembered some guys trying to pry open windows on the drivers'

side. He said he broke the first window on the passenger's side and also the windshield on the passenger's side.

Witness Interview 4

Witness, Iron worker

This witness said that he was on his way to work driving northbound on I-45 when he noticed the back right side of the motorcoach on fire. He said that when he first saw the fire it was 1-2 feet in width climbing up right side of motorcoach from right rear wheel well area. He said that it appeared no one was getting off the bus so he pulled his vehicle over and ran over to it. As he arrived at the loading door he saw a couple of elderly people along with some nurses and proceeded to help the nurses take the elderly couple down the stairwell. He said it appeared one nurse was trying to push her way through in order to get off the motorcoach. The witness said that initially the interior lights were on but he didn't see any fire or smoke inside. The eyewitness said he helped a couple of elderly passengers over to the grassy shoulder and ran back to help remove more people. He said he ran back on the motorcoach and helped pull passengers from their seats or pull passengers up off the floor. He said he made 3 or 4 trips. He said on his last trip he walked 2/3's of the way to the back of the bus but it got too smoky and he ended up crawling back toward the front of the motorcoach. When he got to the front he found a passenger on the floor and assisted him off the motorcoach. The witness added that as he got to the front there was a heavysset Wilmer Police Officer near the door who asked if anyone else was still on the bus. The witness said, "Yes". He said that it was about this time that people outside the motorcoach started braking out the side windows. He said the first one he remembers being broken out was just behind the driver's seat. The witness said that he saw two Spanish looking guys helping people move away from the motorcoach but never saw them get on.

Witness Interview 5

Electrician

This witness said that he was on his way to work with a co-worker (Interview Witness 6), driving northbound on I-45 in the far left lane when he noticed the back right tire of the motorcoach on fire with the interior lights on, and people seated inside. The interviewee said that when he first saw the fire he thought it could have been knocked down with a fire extinguished. He said that he and his co-worker pulled over in front of the motorcoach and ran over to the entry door. He said it was then that he saw nurses attempting to help passengers get out. He said he thought he heard the bus driver yell, "Get them out". He said that he saw that the nurses weren't strong enough to pull the passengers off so he and his co-worker pulled a passenger off. He said that at this time the interior lights were going off so he ran to his car and grabbed a flashlight. He said he returned giving the flashlight to another bystander and told him to shine it through the windshield so they (the rescuers) could see through the smoke when they entered the motorcoach. It was at this point that he saw his co-worker come out with another passenger, so he ran in to get another. He said he grabbed a passenger that was in the aisle toward the front and he pulled him out. He said that the smoke was making him

sick so he ran to the driver's side where the 2nd or 3rd window was partially opened. He said that his co-worker and others hoisted him up so he could reach inside to try and pull out an elderly woman. He said the woman was grabbing his arm but he couldn't budge her. He and his co-worker then decided to run around to the front loading door to attempt to get the woman when he saw two sheriff's deputies. He said as they were about to enter the first explosion occurred and shortly after another one occurred. He said the explosions came from the rear. He said the Deputies then went to the passenger's side and tried to break out windows. He also remembered someone attempting to break out the passenger's side windshield. He said at this point they decided to start pulling the passengers towards the frontage road and away from the burning motorcoach.

Witness Interview 6

Electrician

This witness said that he was on his way to work with a co-worker (Interview Witness 5), driving northbound on I-45 when they noticed the flames coming up from the back right side of the motorcoach. He said that as they drove by they could see the interior lights on and people seated inside. He said that after they stopped and ran up to the motorcoach, they saw the driver running around and nurses yelling for help. He said he recalled seeing one elderly person standing near the entrance. He said his co-worker ran in and pulled off a passenger and after his co-worker came out he ran in and did the same thing. He said that they took turns pulling people off. He said that after his second trip inside he started trying to break open windows from outside because the smoke was getting too thick. The interviewee said that he broke 3 or 4 windows using a hammer someone had given him and then he used the claw part to tear open the plastic liner. He said that one of the driver's side windows was opened so he helped hoist his co-worker up in an attempt to remove an elderly lady. He said that his co-worker couldn't remove the lady so they decided to go back in and get her. He said that as they got to the front door the first explosion occurred. He remembered seeing a Wilmer Police Officer near the bus but didn't recall seeing any law enforcement officers entering the motorcoach.

Witness Interview 7

A/C Technician

This witness said that he was on his way to work driving northbound on I-45 and decided to exit due to traffic. As he exited he said that he noticed the back right side of the motorcoach on fire and pulled off to the side. He said that a Wilmer Police Officer pulled over about the same time. He said he ran over to the bus and there were already several elderly people outside. He said he ran inside only about 10 feet before retreating due to the smoke. He said he helped a few people down the stairs and took them over to the grass prior to going into the motorcoach to help a woman he found in the aisle get out of the vehicle. He said as he was exiting the motorcoach some people started breaking side windows. He said he was about 10 feet away from the motorcoach when the first explosion occurred knocking him to the ground.

Witness Interview 8

This witness was leaving the Houston area and drove up on the motorcoach minutes after it pulled over to the shoulder. According to this witness, he pulled up about 100 meters behind the motorcoach when he saw that there was a small fire in the rear. He said that when he first pulled up, the interior lights of the motorcoach were still on. He said that as he ran up to the passenger's side he could see 4-5 people laying on the ground outside. He walked into the bus and saw two other guys helping people off and didn't want to get in the way so he backed out. He said he yelled for other motorists to help move the passengers away from the bus. After doing so he ran over to the driver's side and saw a guy with a flashlight and told him to go around and shine it through the windshield. He said that people were looking for something to break the windows. According to this witness, someone told him the bus driver had a crowbar. He said that the driver started breaking some windows. He said he thought someone inside opened one of the side windows and he and another person boosted the driver up along side of the window and used the crowbar to prop open the window. He said the driver attempted to pull a woman out but was unsuccessful. When asked how he knew the person was the bus driver, he said that someone told him so and a day or two later he saw the driver's photograph in the newspaper.

First Responder Interviews

Sr. Sergeant Dallas County Sheriff

The Sergeant said that he received the emergency call at 6:07 a.m. and ran code 3 (lights and siren) to the fire location. Because the fire was on the northbound lanes of I-45 and because he was traveling southbound on I-45, he had to drive past the motorcoach fire and circle back to the fire scene. As he pulled up to the motorcoach he could see that flames were engulfing about 2/3's of the motorcoach from the back toward the front. Another Deputy pulled up behind him about the same time and they both ran up to the loading door. The Sergeant said that as they got up to the bus he saw several people lying along passenger side on the ground and a Wilmer Police Officer near the entrance door. He said that as he approached he could hear people inside screaming. The Sergeant said that as he approached he didn't see anyone breaking windows. He said that he walked up into the motorcoach with the Wilmer officer behind him, through a wall of smoke and shined his flashlight toward the back and yelled for people to come toward him. While inside the first explosion occurred so he started backing out. As he got out the other Deputy met him and the Wilmer officer near the entry door to make sure they were okay. The Sergeant said that as they got about 10 feet away there was another blast inside the motorcoach. It was at this point that everyone started moving the elderly passengers away from the motorcoach toward the frontage road since the grass started on fire. According to the Sergeant, a nurse from the bus told him that there were oxygen cylinders aboard the motorcoach. He said he started calling the dispatcher, asking her to notify the fire department. He said that by the time the first fire truck arrived the bus was completely engulfed. According to the Sergeant, he started looking for the bus driver and someone said he went back inside so he started to think he perished in the fire.

According to the Sergeant, the bus driver wasn't located for an hour to an hour and a half later.

Chief of the Wilmer Fire Department (IC)

According to the Chief, he is a fireman in Lancaster, which is a nearby city and was on-duty when he heard the call from dispatch. He said he left the station at 6:28 a.m. and arrived on-scene at 6:49 a.m. The Chief said he arrived just ahead of the Lancaster fire trucks. He said when he arrived there were already several units on-scene from other nearby fire departments and the fire was pretty much extinguished. He said he assumed Incident Command (IC) from one of his Wilmer officers and immediately assigned the Lancaster Fire Department to be in charge of triage. He said he asked the Fire Chief from Dallas County Fire and Rescue to record the destinations of all the patients/passengers who needed to be transported. He said he called the Wilmer dispatch to declare a Mass Casualty Incident (MCI) but was denied. He said that it was initially denied because the Dallas County Fire Department had already requested multiple ambulance and rescue units from the surrounding communities. He said he contacted the Battalion Chief at Lancaster and had him request a declaration of a MCI and it was granted. Afterwards he made sure all the injured were transported.

Wilmer Fire Department Members that Responded (Group Interview)

The following is a compendium of statements made by a number of firemen during an NTSB group interview. They were initially given the incorrect location from dispatch. They were told to go to a location 2 exits north of the fire location. They said they attempted to call the dispatcher but the line was busy due to several reasons;

- Heavy phone traffic from 911 callers contacting dispatch
- They share the same radio frequency as another county 40 miles away and they sometimes get drowned out
- The single dispatcher has to handle all general fire and police calls and all 911 calls

Upon arriving at that location they noticed the Hutchins Fire Department driving south on I-45 so they drove to the next exit and turned around. They said as soon as they turned around and headed south on I-45 they could see a glow and smoke from the motorcoach fire in the distance. They said that as they got closer to the scene traffic became heavy which further delayed their arrival on-scene. Upon their arrival they parked next to the median and carried their hoses over the median wall. The crew said that Hutchins Fire Department drove past the fire and circled back arriving on-scene just behind them. They said when they arrived the bus was already fully engulfed with fire and that fire was blowing out the side windows. They said that they set up their "attack" lines from the front on the driver's side of the bus while the Hutchins FD set up their hoses from the front on the passenger side. One crew member said he could tell that some type of Oxygen tank was involved because there was a blue flame that seemed to be "dancing/shooting" out from the passengers' side towards the rear.

Hutchins Fire Department (Group Interview)

The following is a compendium of statements made by a number of firemen during an NTSB group interview.

According to the crew, when they received the initial call from dispatch the location was wrong. As they drove south on I-45 and came upon the initial (wrong) location and they could see the glow and smoke from the motorcoach further south in the distance. They said that when they arrived at the bus they had to drive by it and circle back through stopped traffic. They said by the time they got to the bus it was completely engulfed in fire. They crew said that the fire was pretty much extinguished when they entered through the entry door. They sprayed the back of the bus before the heat of the stairwell burned a hole through their fire hose. At that point they used the Wilmer Fire Department's fire hose to finish extinguishing the fire.

Wilmer Police Officer,

First responder to enter burning motorcoach

Traffic was heavy. He was ready to go off shift when he heard the 911 call at 6:08 a.m.. He responded by squad car to the Beltline Exit. He took the service road and went southbound.

1-2 minutes later he arrived at the scene and parked about 20 yards in front of the bus, on the service road.

At this time the flames extended forward of the right wheel well area and were going up the side of the bus. Smoke was pouring out the front door. The rear windows are covered by flame and smoke. The front windows appeared intact. The smoke had an acrid smell. People were standing in front and to the side of the bus. He proceeded to move these people away.

Two people were in the doorway of the bus trying to get people out. Smoke was coming out the door at this time. All the windows in the front two-thirds of the bus, and windshield were intact.

He was able to remove a paralyzed occupant in the first seat, with help from a civilian. They then removed 1-3 more people. He could see a person in the second row, but after rescuing the first person, he could no longer see that person.

An Officer removed 3-4 people from the bus.

The smoke filled the bus from the ceiling to about 6-8 inches from the floor.

People were trying to break out windows from the outside. The windows would not break. A man named Jimmy Caldwell, who was at the scene, owned some of the hammers that were being used to try and break the windows.

By the time the officer removed the 2nd person from the bus the smoke layer extended to the floor level. At this time a Sheriff's Deputy had just arrived and was standing at the door of the bus.

The officers said that during his second entry into the bus there was debris falling from the ceiling (debris was not hot enough to burn his hands) and the smoke was much thicker. At this time a Sheriff's Deputy was crouched down in the entrance of the bus with a flashlight. The Sheriff's Deputy was in the stairwell of the bus when an explosion occurred no more than 5 minutes after his arrival on scene. The origin of the explosion appeared to be in the back of the bus. A flash and a pressure wave accompanied the explosion. The noise from the explosion was not as loud as he had expected. He initially thought it was a tire explosion except for the flash. He and the Sheriff's Deputy quickly went to the grassy area and checked themselves for injury when they heard the second explosion.

The second explosion happened no more than 15-20 seconds after the first explosion. Approximately 4-5 additional explosions followed thereafter. The last explosions did not seem as loud nor did they cause flames to billow out of the bus.

According to the officer, after the explosions the fire spread quickly and he did not go back into the motorcoach again because the fire was too intense and the cries for help had stopped. He said he then focused on aiding those that were rescued, by taking off his shirt and using it with his police bag as a pillow for a victim.

A fire department arrived and the officer instructed them to concentrate on the people that could be helped. The bus was completely engulfed in flames at this time.

At some point the Combine fire truck arrived on scene.

The officer said he went to an ambulance to get supplies to help people. He had difficulty convincing the ambulance driver to help people and not fight the fire, because, in his opinion, that was a lost cause at that point.

The officer said that he did not have his in-car camera running. An officer from Wilmer had his camera running, but that officer didn't get there until after the explosions.

Passenger/Resident Interviews

This 88-year-old female said she was seated in the second row on the left side near the window. According to this passenger, they were driving and someone stopped the bus driver and told him his wheel was on fire. She said someone dragged her off the bus and sat her down on the ground. She was able to recall who was sitting behind her, in front of her and next to her. She mentioned that there were a lot of “tubes” of Oxygen on the bus.

An 87-year-old female said she was seated in the second row on the right side near the aisle. She recalled the bus coming to a stop and some of the nurses getting off the bus with the bus driver. When they returned the nurses began telling everyone to get off the bus. She recalled being removed from the bus by one of the nurses. She expressed her concern to the nurse about someone needing to get her sister, who had been sitting next to her near the window, off the bus. She recalled that a heavyset man in the front was being stubborn about getting off the bus and was holding things up.

An 84-year-old female who was seated in row 10 on the right side near the aisle said she was sitting in her seat and all of a sudden she smelled smoke. She said she started to make her way toward the front of the bus to tell the bus driver and before she got to the front of the bus, it stopped. As she got up to the front, the bus driver and several nurses got off then they came back on telling everyone to get off. She said she ended up crawling down the stairs because it was too hard to walk down. From that point someone pulled her farther away. She said that many of the people on the bus were confused and didn’t want to get off. She remembered a “Spanish man” entering the bus to help. She also recalled that it seemed that the driver was always riding the shoulder because she kept hearing what she thought was gravel kicking up. She also said that she kept hearing a gravelly noise while driving.

A 78-year-old male² who was seated in the front seat on the right side next to the aisle said the bus sustained a left front flat tire five minutes prior to the fire erupting. He said he heard something prior to the flat and he told the healthcare giver seated next to him. He said that after the flat tire was repaired they got back on the road. Soon after a car pulled in front of the bus and was trying to signal to the bus driver to stop. He said that the man told the bus driver that the rear brake light was out. The bus driver got out and looked around and came back in telling everyone that the bus was on fire. According to this man, the fire was in the front left tire. He said the tire burst into flames. He said a fireman came in with an ax and smashed out his window. He said more firemen came in and took everyone out of the bus.

² It should be noted that that this passengers suffers from dementia and as a result his recollection of the facts is not very accurate.

A 93-year-old male said that he was seated in the second row behind the driver near the aisle. He recalled one of the nurses saying that there was smoke on the bus and for everyone to get off. He next recalled the bus driver coming on the bus and trying to grab the fire extinguisher underneath the seat across from him. He said the bus driver couldn't get it out. He next recalled being pulled from his seat and off the bus then being dragged away from the bus.

An 81-year-old husband and wife said they were seated in the third row on the left side with the wife seated next to the window and the husband seated along the aisle. According to the wife, they started driving north at approximately 3:00 p.m. Thursday. She said that around 5:00 a.m. they seemed to have hit something that caused a flat tire. She said that after getting back on the road the bus driver smelled something and stopped. She said that the bus driver tried to grab something under the seat in the third row on the right side. The wife related that someone pulled her off and she kept screaming to get her husband off. The husband didn't recall how he got off the bus. According to the wife, her husband suffered a broken right arm while she only inhaled some smoke but was not injured.

A 78-year-old male said he was seated in the first row behind the driver next to the window. According to this passenger, he woke up and the bus was on fire. He recalled the bus having changed a tire down the road. He said that a car passed them and tried to stop the driver to tell him about the fire. He recalled a woman from the back coming toward the front saying she smelled something burning. He said that they all tried to get off. He recalled crawling on the ground and rolling down the stairs. He said that someone pulled him away from the bus. He recalled hearing explosions after getting off the bus.

A 99-year-old female said she was seated in the fourth row on the left next to the aisle. She recalled stopping for gas in Huntsville, Texas prior to hearing the tire blow out and having to wait for someone to fix it. After they fixed the tire she said that they started driving again and later heard another noise. She said that she got up and walked very slowly towards the front until someone picked her up on their shoulder and carried her out and laid her down on the ground. She said the smoke was really thick prior to being carried off.

A 68-year-old male said he was seated in the third row on the right next to the window. He said after getting the first flat tire, the driver rolled on it a ways prior to stopping. He said after getting back on the road and driving a bit he felt and heard a rumble. He then recalled a guy traveling in a white pick-up truck pulling in front of the bus and stopping to tell the driver that the right rear wheel was on fire. He said that when he got up to get out, he took a breath and detected smoke. When he saw someone come up the stairs he asked them to take him off because he was crippled (missing lower half of left leg). He said that a man carried him off. He said he saw other people get on bus to help take others off.

End of Statements